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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the discrepancy between the realities of required inservice teacher performances and the operational outcomes of teacher certification as it is now practiced, and suggests a strategy for establishing a system for evaluating teacher competencies and basing certification policies on that system. Data from a comprehensive evaluation program is given, including responses from 24 graduates. The data includes the following recommendations: (a) a set of approximately 70 additional competencies to be added to the program; (b) elimination and alteration of activities but not the elimination of any competencies already required; (c) the integration of training with ongoing school programs; (d) the requirement of higher performance levels; and (e) more frequent evaluation and feedback during inservice training. Changes in eight areas are necessary for establishing a system for evaluating teacher competencies and basing certification policies on that system. Changes include the following: (a) many evaluation models are needed to fit individual needs; (b) reward systems based on years of experience and hours of college credits must be discarded; and (c) individuals, not programs, must be certified. Finally, three characteristics of a cooperative program that meets the expectation that all involved parties hold for the inservice teacher are discussed. (PD)

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TOWARD A PERFORMANCE-BASED CERTIFICATION SYSTEM FOR TEACHERS

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Problem

The specific problem to be addressed in this paper concerns a discrepancy between the realities of required in-service teacher performances and the operational outcomes of teacher certification as it is presently practiced in most states. This writer has felt for a number of years that what is required of in-service teachers relative to day-to-day operations and what is required to obtain a teaching certificate are quite different things. Informally obtained feedback from teachers around the country has given support to this contention, and data gathered in recent evaluation of Weber State College's Performance-Based Teacher Education tends to further confirm this writer's perceptions.

Traditional Teacher Certification

In the pioneer school, a teacher was someone who knew more than most of the students, and this was, in fact, the basis of credentialling. This could be witnessed in the use of more advanced pupils to teach less advanced ones--thus, the advanced student was "credentialled" in the same way as the teacher, and in many cases, later assumed that formalized role, in another school. As more and more knowledge became important to be known, the normal school diploma became the desired certificate. The diploma was popularly assumed to imply that graduates had achieved

some minimal level of understanding of this expanded field of knowledge. As education was raised to the "school" and "college" levels in institutions of higher education, and states began to install "unified" school systems, a reciprocal arrangement between state governments and these schools extended the conception of the normal school certificate so that the state certificate was the minimum requirement for access to any school in the state. In one, it was also the maximum requirement as it became a license for incompetence as well as competence. Such a system remains in force in most states today.

Discrepancy Data From Teachers

Given the existence of a certificate as a statewide license, one might infer that those who hold such a license are viewed as being operationally competent, by some definition, in the eyes of the state and those who hire them as teachers. It would seem safe to assume that the range of operating capabilities among certified personnel, even in relation to tasks most of them have to perform on a recurring basis, is quite extensive. Commentary from teachers, principals, school boards, professional associations, students, and parents easily supports such an assumption.

Prior association with a teacher education program gave this writer access to teacher education students returning to campus from internship and resulted in the establishment of continuing relationships with them, especially during their first year teaching experience. Feedback from these first year teachers

often dealt with their frustration at knowing that they needed additional training to meet the requirements of their day-to-day operation. Such training was not generally available through district in-service sources and there was no pre-structured means available for meeting felt needs unless these teachers could enroll in a graduate program. Such programs were generally judged to be irrelevant to their immediate needs. In their eyes, their teacher education program stopped short of preparing them adequately for the realities of teaching--yet, they were licensed to practice anywhere in the state.

These students reported, in many cases, that they had sought aid and advice from experienced teachers, who it seemed, felt many of the same frustrations as first year teachers were experiencing, but accepted the situation as permanent reality.

Most recently, this discrepancy between certification requirements and teaching task requirements was raised by graduates of Weber State College Performance-Based Teacher Education program.

Data was sought during a comprehensive program evaluation, from program graduates, district personnel officers, principals, and in-service teachers familiar with the program, in attempting to determine whether program graduates were prepared to perform the tasks required of a full-time teacher.

In one evaluation activity, 24 graduates were polled in three days of intensive interviewing regarding the many facets of this question. Graduates were very critical of their own capabilities as well as many practices of their more experienced

colleagues which they had observed in the field. When asked if the program had provided them with skills needed to perform successfully in their jobs, at the level of performance required, they responded in the affirmative, but with several reservations.

First, the group reached consensus on a set of approximately 70 additional competencies they would add to the program. Second, while they suggested elimination and alteration of activities, they did not suggest elimination of any competency required in the present program. Third, they were adamant about the need for a true integration of their training with ongoing school programs so that competencies could be thoroughly "reality tested." Fourth, they asked that they be evaluated and given feedback more often in pre-service training. Finally, they would require higher performance levels in the program to insure that graduates will be able to function effectively in the most trying and tedious instructional situations, as well as in the most favorable situations.

These summarized findings from the graduates were reinforced, by and large, in data gathered from over 100 in-service teachers, principals, representatives of professional organizations, and district personnel officers. This confirmation is considered to be quite meaningful by program operators, especially considering the fact that demand for Weber State graduates is quite high. This demand is evidenced by preferred hiring practices by several districts, and the fact that the employment rate for Weber State graduates is higher than that of any other state institution. In addition to the demand factor, reports from the field indicate

that first year graduates from the program are assigned interns from other institutions by their principals, and that in-service teachers often seek out the graduates, both voluntarily and by direction, for aid in solving instructional problems.

The data would seem to indicate that districts prefer Weber graduates over those of other institutions, have confidence in their abilities to the point of identifying them as models for other teachers, but want us to prepare them more fully. Graduates feel that they are successful, but they, too, desire a more intensive and extensive preparation prior to certification.

New Developments in Certification

As legislation for school accountability gains passage in several states, and other states are considering such measures, the matter of quality control in teacher certification receives greater consideration from local school districts and state departments of education. Rising educational expenses in schools and increasingly diversified demands upon education from the populace, coupled with increased citizen complaints regarding the performance of education cause local districts to focus their attention upon competency levels evidenced in professional staffs.

This concern has been evidenced by changes in district hiring practices and in the kinds of in-service training experiences districts are now requesting. The "visiting fireman" consultant, who is a master at generating innovative and exciting ideas for other people to implement, seems to be less in demand

today than he has been in the recent past. Districts are more interested in having in-service programs to meet their particular felt and/or diagnosed needs, just as the citizenry expects the schools to satisfy similar needs on their part.

Along with the increased attention to assuring competence for in-service teachers, school districts are becoming more insistent that teacher training institutions provide a pool of candidates who enter their first year with sets of skills which have not been expected in the past. Districts have employed various strategies from cooperation to coercion in attempting to gain input to teacher educators. In effect, they are passing on their concern for quality control to colleges and universities, thereby providing additional reason for those institutions to be concerned with assuring the abilities of their graduates.

In most states, departments of education are being assigned responsibility for preparing districts for implementation of systematic accountability programs. This change means that state departments will be concerned with operationalizing quality control programs for teachers on a statewide basis. Several states, Utah among them, are planning to exercise this responsibility, in part, through the certification process.

One alternative which a number of departments are considering in this vein is performance-based certification for teachers and pupil personnel services professionals. This would apply to in-service as well as beginning teachers. This proposed certification process is quite likely to become law in several states within

the next three years, so the concerns in many state departments at this time involve questions of "how" and "on what basis" to implement performance-based certification, not whether it will be implemented.

Suffice it to say that several state departments are likely to require that teachers demonstrate a set of competencies at a minimal level of proficiency prior to awarding a certificate in the near future. Institutions whose graduates cannot achieve this level will have ample reason to be concerned about their futures. It would probably behoove them to prepare now for what is likely to be demanded of them in the near future.

Given the increasingly complex and demanding expectations teachers hold for themselves, those held by teacher training programs, school systems, parents, students, and credentialling agencies, the need for a system for evaluating teaching competencies before initial certification and during re-certification is evident. The absence of such a system perpetuates incompetence, and does not furnish teachers or any concerned party with any objective or meaningful assessment of whether, or to what extent, complex and demanding expectations are being met.

A Suggested Strategy

In order to establish a system for evaluating teacher competencies and basing certification policies on that system, several changes are necessary in the ways we think of education and teachers,

and how these perceptions effect the operation of our schools. These necessary changes involve self-fulfilling prophesies, which we adhere to, that upon careful consideration, seem actually to be self-deluding prophesies. There is no intent here to blame anyone for these areas needing change, only to urge that those who hold these perceptions need alter them to accomodate an evaluation system that will be more effective than continuing to operate under self-delusion. Those areas needing to be affected by change include:

1. The idea that one evaluation model can serve all purposes. Many models are actually needed. The luxury of a single model, administered in parts on differing but pre-planned occasions, can only be valid when students, conditions, expected outcomes, and teachers' skills are all standardized.

2. Discarding the idea that every teacher can or should behave in the same way. School and district personnel should operationalize expectations for teachers in individual job descriptions regarding desired outcome and process expectations.

3. Teachers can no longer allow themselves the excuse that, "I taught very well, but the students just didn't learn."

4. Reward systems based upon years of experience and hours of college credit obtained must be discarded. There is no indication that skills enabling survival in school-district employment and effectively playing the college course game have anything to do with establishing effective levels of teacher competence.

5. A degree and certificate, under present systems, do not equal competence. We certify programs, not individuals under these conditions. Teacher training programs should, instead, ensure that their graduates can perform, at least at minimum levels, those competencies which we know, by experience, will be needed in almost all instructional situations.

6. Everyone involved in training, credentialling, hiring, evaluating, and being teachers, needs to turn away from the concept of "Professor Jesus." No irreverance is intended here, but the conception actually exists that teachers should, as a matter of course, be able to be all things to all parties involved in an educational system. There are many problems which will disallow our producing such a teacher, not the least of which is the kaliedoscope of perceptions involved in operationalizing everyone's conception of such a teacher. In the first place, some components of such a conceptual miracle are mutually exclusive by definition. Secondly, some pairs of these competencies, when implemented together, remove the probability of effect resulting from either member of the pair.

We must define our expectations in terms of what is realistic and attainable from the teacher's point of view, and what is acceptable from his clients' points of view. A strategy for continuous improvement in performance is not, however, unreasonable to expect.

7. In-service training being equated to hours of college credit obtained is a conception that begs adjustment. Such training

should be designed to meet discrepancies revealed by needs assessments or similar techniques.

8. A change in the deployment of inexperienced teachers must occur. The pattern of the first year teacher receiving the most difficult and undesirable teaching assignments in schools is inhumane both for teacher and students, as well as constituting misuse and ineffective use of personnel. It was disconcerting to note in the Weber program evaluation that first year teachers are most likely to recognize the negative effects of such situations, most likely to note their own shortcomings, and most likely to question such practices.

These perceptual changes will enable establishment of a cooperative program among credentialling agencies, colleges, teachers, and school districts which is necessary to meet the complex expectations all the involved parties hold for the in-service teacher. Such a program should be characterized by the following factors.

First, there must be established, between the teacher training institution and the public schools, a close relationship which has long been a recognized need, but which has seldom been fulfilled. This relationship has been described as a "Teacher Center" which will be responsive to felt and/or diagnosed needs of pre-service and in-service teachers.

Second, graduation from a teacher education program must be given only provisional certification unless validity of the program can be established for field-based criteria. Present certification

practices are based on the idea that programs are certifiable, therefore, their graduates are. Judgment of certificability must be made on an individual, rather than program, basis.

Third, with the establishment of the Teaching Center concept, we can cease our operationalization of the questionable assumption that every teacher is capable of assuming full professional duties upon graduation from an accredited teacher education program. The first year teacher's need for involvement in extensive and intensive training is likely to be a significant one. The need for involvement in intensive training by in-service teachers is likely to be much higher than that indicated by policies in most districts.

Meeting the challenges inherent in the concept of performance-based accreditation is a difficult task which is likely to alter significantly the presently accepted structures of teacher education. Yet, the awarding of certificates in a validated, individual performance-based system holds promises of quality control and improvement of instruction which are difficult to fulfill without such a system.

The procedures to be employed in on-line implementation of such a system will surely include peer observation and rating, self-observation and rating, student rating, superior observation and rating, critical examination of student performance and attitude data, and if possible, should include observation and rating by an independent party with no self-interests to preserve. Perhaps an assessment team from another school district or university

would serve this purpose. Decisions about weighting output from various activities, which assessment techniques should be employed with which data-gathering methods, etc.; should be cooperatively resolved among teachers and clients prior to the implementation of the system.

The same cooperative arrangement is required with regard to action to be taken in light of revealed data. These cooperative efforts should assume, as reciprocal goals, providing diagnostic and prescriptive feedback to teachers which will enable them to attempt removal of undesired discrepancies. Districts should be prepared and willing to absorb the costs of bringing teacher skills to desired competency levels. The cumulative effects of doing so are likely to improve the quality of education provided for the entire community, which should be an on-going goal of the district, the training agency, and the credentialling agent.